

## Extreme Arranging: An Autoethnographic Reconciling of Differences and Exploring of Similarities Between Seemingly Incompatible Genres

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### Abstract

*'Extreme Arranging' is a term used by the author to define musical arrangements that cross a wide gap between two musical styles, whether that gap is conceptual or the physical distance between their geographic locations. The inspiration behind 'extreme arranging' came from various popular and classical artists who reached across genres in a similar manner. Connecting two 'distant' styles in one arrangement necessitates choices by the arranger as to which elements of the original song and arranged style should be retained or discarded. Throughout, the author uses his autoethnography to explore his interest in 'extreme arranging,' and he relates the choices made in his arrangements and to his background of being an American raised by American parents in Japan. The author explores the development of his arranging process and two recent arrangements using similarities that appealed to him and decisions in reconciling differences in form, harmony, rhythm, text, and melody. The author draws connections between his intercultural background and the process of arranging songs to a seemingly incompatible genre.*

**Keywords** *arranging, popular music, Baroque, Renaissance, music theory*

"Extreme Arranging" is based on a roughly 14-year process I have developed since I was an undergraduate student. This article originated as an oral presentation at the Music-Performing Arts (MusPA) conference at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris in Tanjung Malim, Malaysia on 2 December, 2014. The original presentation focused on the musical techniques used to achieve the sound, focusing mainly on music theory and history. The autoethnographic connections between the arranging process and my background as an American raised in Japan is an entirely new development presented in this article.

Autoethnography is a qualitative approach to research that uses the researcher as the subject, combining autobiography and ethnology. According to Adams and Holman Jones (2008), "A researcher uses tenets of *autobiography* and *ethnography* to *do* and *write* autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product." Because of the completely subjective nature of certain fields, autoethnography is used as a basis to establish one's own ethnography as authoritative. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010) say that "[a]utoethnographers recognize the

innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process”. Similar to the nature of bridging the contrasting music styles in this paper, Ellis, Adams and Bochner also add that autoethnography “attempts to disrupt the binary of science and art”. This paper is largely a ‘reflexive ethnography’, which according to one definition is where “the ethnographer’s backstage research endeavors become the focus of investigation” (Ellis, 2004). This process began as a ‘musical ethnography’, studying the styles and original songs, but is now turned inward to the researcher to describe why I chose the songs and styles contained in this paper.

### How ‘Extreme Arranging’ Was Developed

When I was a child, my parents moved our family to Japan. I was raised by parents from one culture (and the culture of my passport and citizenship), while residing in another culture. I was a typical “Third Culture Kid”, raised outside of his or her passport country, a term coined by Ruth Hill Useem (1990), stemming from the idea that the combination of two cultures forms a mixed, hybrid, or ‘third’ culture for the child. In retrospect, I see a connection between my ‘third culture’ upbringing, the music I enjoyed as a child, and the style that I eventually call “extreme arranging”. One of the first cassette tapes I had as a child was ‘Weird Al’ Yankovic’s *Off the Deep End* (1992). I distinctly remember having quickly memorised the polka medley of songs popular at that time, “Polka Your Eyes Out”. On every major album since his second album *Dare to be Stupid* (1985), Yankovic has included a polka medley consisting of songs popular within the last few years of the album’s release. “Now That’s What I Call Polka!” (2014) is his latest polka medley arrangement of songs by current popular artists such as Miley Cyrus, Pitbull, Psy, Carly Rae Jepsen, and Macklemore. The initial appeal for me was the contrast of the most popular music of the day and the polka, generally considered unpopular in the places I have lived. ‘Folk music’, let alone ‘polka’, did not make the top 10 genres of the 2014 U.S. sales report. The category of ‘Classical’ comprised of 1.4% of all sales. Conversely, ‘Country’, ‘Rock’, ‘Pop’, and ‘Hip-hop’ (the genres typically covered in the polka medleys) made up 72.3% of all sales in 2014 (Nielson.com, 2014).

The musical groups that I took interest as a teenager and young adult were those that would play arrangements of popular songs in the same vein as ‘Weird Al’ Yankovic. Hayseed Dixie originally specialised in bluegrass arrangements of AC/DC songs and later expanded to other popular music. Richard Cheese specialises in lounge and big band jazz arrangements of popular songs. For me, the humour arises from the cognitive dissonance of a 1940s jazz combo or bluegrass arranging songs from the 1990s onward. The lyrics of the original songs contain more profanity and open references to sex and drug use than songs associated with the arranged style. Arranging songs in a style significantly older than the original is like a musical ‘fish out of water’.

This musical ‘fish out of water’ concept appealed to me as a ‘Third Culture Kid’. A blonde Caucasian boy adapting to the homogenous Japanese culture stood out in a similar way to polka or big band arrangements adapting popular music. Many Japanese people would commonly tell me in basic, heavily-accented English that they did not speak English, even after I had spoken to them several times in (near native) Japanese.

The disconnection between my looks and the language I was speaking would not even register as Japanese to them. In the same vein, when hearing a polka version of a popular song, the original song might not be recognised because of the different context in which it is presented. While the words and melody are preserved, the substitution of the accordion and tuba for the guitar and bass guitar and the substitution of polka rhythms and tempo for the slower, syncopated drum beat of the original pop song drastically change the timbre. The ‘language’ (song) is the same but the ‘speaker’ (instrumentation, timbre, rhythmic accompaniment) is different.

Mixing popular music with genres far from the top of the mainstream charts became a monumental influence in my composing. I never consciously made the connection between my cultural surroundings and the music I enjoyed until recently, many years after I moved back to the USA as an adult. While writing an analysis to my composition *The Twain Meet* (Johnson, W. A., 2012c), a double concerto for banjo, shamisen, I developed two terms to connect my composition process to my background. The first was ‘Third Culture Music’, related to the ‘Third Culture Kid’, and the second was ‘Extreme Arranging’. Because of the deep cultural reflection contained within *The Twain Meet*, the piece was analysed through the lens of ‘Third Culture Music’, connecting it to the hybrid ‘culture across borders’ upbringing of a Third Culture Kid. This article is an exploration of the second term, ‘extreme arranging’. While arranging is not explicitly intercultural in nature, I can relate much of the process of selection and arranging, especially in the ‘extreme’, to the intercultural situations I have experienced living as an American in Japan as a child.

### **Explanations of ‘Extreme’ Arranging and Selection of ‘Incompatible’ Genres**

‘Extreme Arranging’ is a term I have applied over the last four years to a song or piece of music (‘original song’) arranged as a style (‘arranged style’) that seems incompatible. I primarily use this term because it is concise and eye-catching. What qualifies as ‘extreme’ does not follow an exact formula. It relies heavily on judgment based on what genres could be considered ‘incompatible’ within a culture, and therefore all judgments in my case are influenced by my autoethnography.

‘Incompatibility’ is a concept my family encountered as part of living in Japan. One phrase we heard frequently was “you are not Japanese—you will never understand”. To Japanese eyes, we could never be fully compatible with Japanese culture, and yet, we lived there safely without major incident. We adapted to the surroundings and learned the language, and to a lesser extent, the Japanese people learned from us. We were never close to being considered as Japanese but figured out a way to reconcile the differences in culture. This reconciling of differences while never fully integrating is a similar goal of ‘extreme arranging’.

As to what is ‘incompatible’, I frequently select two genres that do not ‘share’ certain aspects such as history, culture, prestige, popularity, audience, and music elements such as rhythm, melody, mode, and instrumentation. I typically begin selecting the original song, which is most commonly a popular song where I live. As I lived in the USA from 2000 to 2014, and a majority of my YouTube viewership is from the USA, Canada, and

the UK (see Table 1), much of what I determine to be ‘incompatible’ with the original song comes from a perspective from the USA or an English-speaking country. I then select the arranged genre based on the above factors of ‘incompatibility’.

**Table 1** YouTube.com breakdown of viewership and subscribers of *jimlapbap* (author’s account name) by nation as of 2 April, 2015

<b>Nation</b>	<b>Views</b>	<b>Subscribers</b>	<b>Likes</b>
United States	595,192	1,325	5,994
United Kingdom	107,000	193	877
Canada	74,706	172	707
Japan	55,969	21	147
Germany	47,585	54	379
Australia	28,401	90	330
Brazil	19,730	50	164
Netherlands	17,624	24	116
Sweden	15,156	20	168
France	14,229	18	94

I also frequently select an arranged style less popular than the style of the original. From my perspective, arranging a contemporary song in an older style is more ‘extreme’ because it is rarer in the USA than the reverse. Older songs are commonly remade in a contemporary style in the USA, exemplified by music reality competitions on television. The winner of the 2014 season of *American Idol* (which has had consistently high ratings in the USA since airing), Caleb Johnson performed “Dream On” (Tyler, 1973) by Aerosmith, and “Maybe I’m Amazed” by Paul McCartney (1970). Both songs are performed with elements from the original mixed with contemporary rock accompaniment (Johnson, C., 2014a, 2014b). To compare this to living in Japan, we would use rice bowls to eat ice cream, and the Japanese would eat spaghetti with chopsticks and slurp (which is considered polite in Japan but not in the USA) the noodles. The rice bowls used for ice cream (adapting a local item for an international food) was stranger to the Japanese people than when they ate spaghetti (adapting an international food to local eating customs).

One of the major issues with ‘extreme arranging’ is a common issue with being a Third Culture Kid: I am a combination of Japanese and American culture and not fully part of either culture. One of the most common questions I get when describing my background is “where do you like better: Japan or the United States?” The answer is both. I like both and have adapted aspects of both. In ‘extreme arranging’, I usually enjoy both the genre of the original song and the arranged style. Unfortunately, this answer of ‘both’ is not always satisfactory to those asking it. I have encountered many Americans who openly disliked Japanese culture for being inflexible, or Japanese who openly disliked American culture for being too direct. Similarly, I have encountered many negative reactions from those (mostly non-music major university students in the USA) who like music popular—largely high-selling popular music from the

1960s to the present day—when playing polkas, jazz, barbershop quartets, Western classical, or non-Western music. I have encountered negative reactions from those who enjoy classical or atonal music when playing the same popular music. Because of this adapting process, I have commonly found myself in between cultures, not fully adapting the culture I reside in (Japan as a child, and currently Malaysia), and not fully representing the culture of my parents (USA). Because of this, the ‘extreme arranging’ adapts many aspects of the arranged style to the original song, but does not fully represent the arranged style. The goal for both my upbringing and ‘extreme arranging’ is to utilise my position and serve as something of a translator or an intermediary between the two different cultures or genres.

### Measuring the Development of ‘Extreme Barbershop Arrangements’

Arranging popular songs as barbershop quartets is something I have done routinely since 2008 and can use to track the progression of ‘extreme arranging’. In most cases, the harmony of popular songs and barbershop music are incompatible. The pop songs that I arrange for barbershop typically contain a set chord progression accompanying a melody that does not always match the notes in the accompaniment. Conversely, barbershop quartet music’s harmony is based on the circle of fifths, and each note in the melody completes the harmony (‘An Information Manual for Barbershop Quartets’). Because of this incompatibility, if the harmony of the original song is preserved, the arrangement will not resemble barbershop music. If the melody, harmony, and words are changed completely to suit the barbershop style, the original song may not be recognisable. As a comparison, arranging a popular song for marching band may still retain the harmony and melody exactly from the original, and the only major change would be in timbre. If the arranger opted to arrange the pop song as a traditional march in the style of John Philip Sousa, more choices would have to be made, such as whether to change the harmonies of the original to extended chords found in the music of that era, or preserve the original harmonies. Moving to Japan from the USA where the language and culture are vastly different would require more adjusting than moving within the USA.

The development of my barbershop arrangement had a similar parallel to my adjusting to Japan as a child. When I first moved to Japan, I was unable to read signs or navigate the crowds and it took several years for me to begin to understand the culture. When I began ‘extreme arranging’, I was not successful in capturing the essence of the arranged style. My first attempt at an ‘extreme’ barbershop arrangement was “Barbershop Star” in “Nickelback Rock Star Barbershop Quartet” (Johnson, W. A. 2012a), an arrangement of “Rockstar” (Adair et al., 2006) by the band Nickelback (see Figure 1). The arrangement retained the original song’s melody and harmony. As a result, the final arrangement did not sound like a traditional barbershop quartet arrangement, but as a barbershop-influenced *a cappella* arrangement (see Figure 2). Numerous YouTube users were quick to point out that the arrangement did not sound like barbershop. On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is the original song and 10 is a quintessential example of the arranged style, “Barbershop Star” is more toward the centre (see Figure 3).

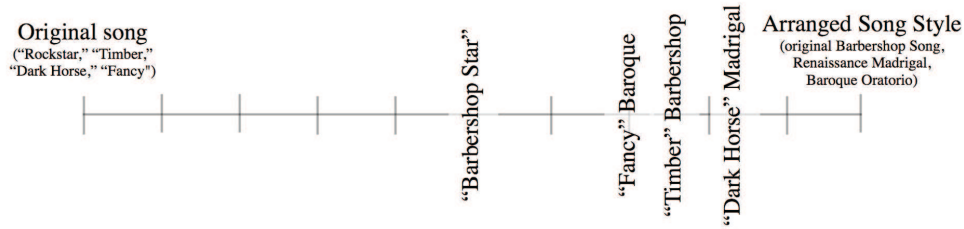
'Cause we all just wan-na be big rock stars and live in hill - top hous-es driv-ing fif-teen cars. The girls come ea-sy and the drugs come cheap, we'll all stay skin-ny 'cause we just won't eat, and we'll

Figure 1 Author’s lead sheet transcription of Nickelback’s “Rockstar”

wan - na be bar-ber-shop stars \_\_\_\_ hill-top hous-es fif-teen cars \_\_\_\_  
 'Cause we all just wan-na be bar-ber-shop stars and live in hill-top hous-es driv-ing fif-teen cars The  
 wan - na be bar-ber-shop stars \_\_\_\_ hill-top hous-es fif-teen cars \_\_\_\_  
 Doom doom doom All wan-na be bar-ber-shop stars \_\_\_\_ hill-top hous-es fif-teen cars \_\_\_\_

48  
 girls come \_\_\_\_ drugs come cheap \_\_\_\_ all stay \_\_\_\_ just won't eat \_\_\_\_  
 girls come eas-y and the drugs come cheap We'll all stay skin-ny 'cause we just won't eat and we'll  
 girls come \_\_\_\_ drugs come cheap \_\_\_\_ all stay \_\_\_\_ just won't eat \_\_\_\_  
 girls come eas-y drugs come cheap all stay skin-ny just won't eat \_\_\_\_

Figure 2 Excerpt of same passage from author’s “Barbershop Star” arrangement



**Figure 3** A simple scale roughly representing the arrangement choices needed in an “extreme arrangement”, and the songs cited in this article

This scale implies that anything less than a note-for-note copy of a barbershop song could not be an accurate barbershop arrangement, which is similar to the idea that I could never fully integrate in Japanese culture. Thus, my goal in arranging is to aim for a high number on the scale, just like my goal in another culture is to learn as much of a language as I can (which is currently Malay). Each year since 2012, I arrange a barbershop medley of the most popular songs of the calendar year based on a combination of position and longevity on the Billboard Hot 100, which measures music popularity in the USA. A principal feature of barbershop quartet music is its harmony (as the primary governing body worldwide is the Barbershop Harmony Society): “Barbershop harmony avoids modern sounds and uses many barbershop seventh chords” (*An Information Manual for Barbershop Quartets*, 2011). Harmony is the largest change made to the original songs in the recent barbershop medleys. I almost exclusively ignore the original song’s harmonies and retain the original melody as the primary link between original song (see Figure 4) and arrangement (see Figure 5). Of the 40 songs I have arranged for barbershop music, none of them contain a harmonic movement through the circle of fifths or ‘barbershop seventh chords’. I write an entirely new harmony that best fits both the melody and the rules of barbershop. Typically, I try to fit the notes of the melody into a circle of fifths progression, where it begins on the tonic chord the phrase resolves on the tonic or dominant chord. While the resulting arrangement is closer to barbershop music than the original style, it is still not completely idiomatic to the arranged style (see Figure 3 above). As I have improved over the years in the ‘barbershop language’ I am able to make the arrangements sound closer to traditional barbershop music. However, just like the Japanese or Malay languages, there is no way I would ever be a native speaker or to get the songs to be indistinguishable from traditional barbershop music.

**Figure 4** Author’s lead sheet transcription of “Timber” (Arrington et al., 2013) by Pitbull, featuring Kesha

**Timber**

79 we'll be count-ing stars It's go-ing down I'm yel-ing tim-ber You bet-ter

82 You bet - ter move move You bet - ter move You bet - ter dance Let's make a

**Figure 5** Excerpt of same passage from author's "2014 Review Barbershop Review" medley (Johnson, "2014 Review Barbershop Revue", 2014)

### The Construction of Two Recent "Extreme Arrangements"

In 2014, I arranged two songs which I deemed 'extreme' because they both were very popular in the USA and are arranged into styles that are centuries old: A Renaissance madrigal arrangement of "Dark Horse" (Gottwald et al., 2013) by Katy Perry featuring Juicy J, and a Baroque oratorio arrangement of "Fancy" (Aitchison et al., 2014) by Iggy Azalea featuring Charli XCX. I chose "Dark Horse" and "Fancy" when writing the arrangements in 2014 because they reached number two and four respectively on Billboard.com's 2014 year end Hot 100 songs (<http://www.billboard.com/charts/year-end/2014/hot-100-songs>). I was teaching a music appreciation class to non-music majors and was always searching for hybrid music that connected works studied in class to the music to which they listen. These two arrangements were results of not finding such works using current popular songs. Arranging these two songs also appealed to me because in the same way that I grew up as an American in Japan trying to reconcile the cultural differences and explore the similarities between American and Japanese culture, I frequently try to reconcile differences and explore similarities between popular music and Western music history genres.

The main precedent and inspiration for "Dark Horse Madrigal" (Johnson, W. A., 2014a) is the King's Singers arrangement of "Can't Buy Me Love" (Lennon, McCartney, 1980), which influenced many of the changes adapted from "Dark Horse" to its madrigal arrangement. People such as P.D.Q. Bach inserting popular themes in "Classical Rap" (Schickele, 1990) and Peter Breiner's (1993) *Beatles Go Baroque*, a Baroque-style concerto grosso using Beatles songs as a source, provide precedent in adapting popular themes to Baroque music. The arrangement of "Dark Horse" was



initially completed as a self-produced version uploaded to YouTube.com in February 2014 to coincide with my Music Appreciation class's unit on Renaissance music. The arrangement of "Fancy" was initially completed as a self-produced version uploaded to YouTube.com in July 2014 (Johnson, W. A., 2014c).

### Similarities Between the Original Songs and Arranged Styles

After a song and genre have been selected and I deem the arrangement 'extreme', the differences between the original song and arranged style may be overwhelming. Because of this, I then focus on small elements they share. What first struck me about "Dark Horse" is that each phrase of the melody when isolated sounded like it began in D-flat major/Ionian and ended in B-flat minor/Aeolian (the relative minor). This reminded me specifically of Thomas Morley's "April is in My Mistress' Face" (1594), in which the phrases would begin in F major and end in D minor, with the occasional cadence using a Picardythird (see Figure 6). Another connection I made from the original song to the arranged style was the form. If the bridge/rap is removed from "Dark Horse," the form of the original (see Table 2) nearly matches the form (see Table 3 & Table 4) Morley's "Sing We Chant It" (1595). Both "Sing We and Chant It" and "Dark Horse" end with a nonverbal codetta, with "Dark Horse" ending with an instrumental break (see Figure 7) and Morley ending in "fa la" (see Figure 8).

Figure 6 Author's reduction of *April is in My Mistress Face* with basic harmonic analysis

**Table 2** The overall form of “Dark Horse”

Section	Phrase	Key
Introduction	Instrumental break	B-flat minor (i)
Verse 1	<i>a</i>	
	<i>a</i>	
	<i>a'</i>	
	<i>b</i>	
Chorus 1	<i>a</i>	D-flat major (IV-I-vi-V)
	<i>c</i>	
	<i>c</i>	
	<i>d</i>	
	Instrumental Break	B-flat minor
Verse 2	Same as verse 1	
Chorus 2	Same as Chorus 1 without instrumental break	D-flat major
Bridge/Rap	Accompaniment of verse and chorus (both shortened)	B-flat minor, D-flat major
Chorus 3	Same as Chorus 1	D-flat major

**Table 3** The form of Thomas Morley’s *Sing We and Chant It*

Section	Phrase	Key
Verse 1 and 2	<i>a</i>	G: I → V
	<i>b</i> (fa la la 1)	G: I → V-I
Chorus	<i>c</i>	C: V → I
	<i>d</i>	G: V7/V → V-I
	<i>e</i> (fa la la 2)	G: I → V-I

**Table 4** The form of “Dark Horse Madrigal”

Section	Phrase	Key	Notes
Verse 1 and 2	<i>a</i>	D-flat major, cadence in B-flat minor	TB only
	<i>a</i>		SA only
	<i>a'</i>	(same, cadence uses Picardy 3 <sup>rd</sup> )	Extended phrase
	<i>b</i>	B-flat major	Homophonic, homorhythmic
	<i>a'</i>	D-flat major, cadence in B-flat minor (picardy 3rd)	Extended phrase
Chorus	<i>c</i>	D-flat major, cadence in B-flat minor (picardy 3rd)	
	<i>c</i>		Counterpoint is supporting voices
	<i>d</i>		
	<i>d'</i>		Extended phrase
	<i>e</i>		Codetta “fa la la”



Figure 7 The instrumental passage between verses in “Dark Horse”



Figure 8 Author’s reduction of “fa la” ending of verse of *Sing We and Chant It*

The original connection I made with “Fancy” to the Baroque era was conceptual. While I was singing “I’m so fancy” from the song’s chorus, and I found myself taking a ‘fancy’ operatic tone with a faux-British accent. This reminded me of the ‘fancy’ attire of the era and ‘fancy’ ornaments in Baroque music. The ‘fancy’ concept also extended across both historical eras as orchestral music then and now can have an implication of ‘fanciness’ as a status symbol. I also made two musical connections between “Fancy” and Baroque music. The first was the use of an ostinato in the bass line throughout “Fancy” (see Figure 9), which could be used as a ritornello in a Baroque arrangement (see Figure 10). The other is that the melody of the chorus (see Figure 11) and bridge (see Figure 12) and ostinato throughout fancy fit the key of C-minor (with occasional changes to the relative E-flat major).

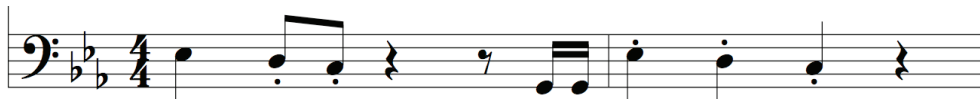


Figure 9 Author’s transcription of the two-measure ostinato throughout “Fancy”

**Figure 10** The two measure ostinato as “ritornello” in the Baroque arrangement of “Fancy”

**Figure 11** Author’s transcription of the melody in the chorus of “Fancy”

**Figure 12** Author’s transcription of the melody in the bridge of “Fancy”

In my experience, finding similarities are important to connect ‘incompatible’ styles. One of the major things that helped me adjust in Japan was baseball, my favourite sport. Baseball is a sport both popular in the USA and Japan and served as a familiar sight present in both cultures. While the culture and atmosphere surrounding a baseball game in Japan is greatly different, the rules were mostly the same. The existence of the sport in both countries eased my culture shock and helped me learn about Japan through

a familiar event. In the same way, finding common elements between the original song and an arranged style is to ease the ‘culture shock’ of exposure to a different style, and can help the listener connect to the arranged style through the familiar song.

### Choices Made to ‘Reconcile the Incompatibilities’

After I make connections between genres, I start working on how to make the original song sound like the arranged style. I view the similarities as an anchor to the listener, which allows me the freedom to change major aspects of the original song. Parts of the melody, lyrics, rhythm, harmony, and form cannot fit in both the popular song and Renaissance or Baroque music. I made choices to adapt, expand, and contract various parts of the original song to resemble the arranged style.

**Form.** The first change I made to both arrangements was the form. While “Dark Horse Madrigal” is similar, I removed the bridge section, which is a rap. This is one of those ‘irreconcilable differences’ that I did not want work into a madrigal arrangement. Including the rap as it is in the original would have changed the overall sound of the madrigal from my goal of a 7 or 8 on the above scale to a 4 or 5 because of the anachronistic technique. Had I been wanted to arrange a specific hybrid of rap and madrigal, leaving the rap in would have been appropriate for this arrangement.

In “Fancy”, the form is largely preserved (see Table 5), but I changed the length of each section. The original song alternates between a rapped verse and a sung chorus. For the arrangement, I used a recitative texture (see Figure 13) to replace the rap, and an aria texture as the chorus. I removed several lines from each rapped verse because the rhythmic speed of the original is much faster than a Baroque recitative. Even with lines removed from the verses, the chorus was still shorter than the verses, so I added instrumental echoing between phrases of the chorus, followed by a sequence based on the final phrase of the chorus. In the same way as Schickele in “Classical Rap”, I could have chosen to preserve the rap as the original but felt using a recitative was closer to the Baroque sound for the same reasons I omitted the rap from “Dark Horse.”

**Table 5** Comparison of the form of the original “Fancy” and the Baroque arrangement

Section	Original	Arrangement
Verse 1	Numerous lines of rapped phrases	Recitative, several lines omitted
Chorus 1	<i>a</i>	Instruments echo melodic line, Eb major
	<i>b</i>	Instruments echo melodic line, cadence in C-minor
	<i>a</i>	Instruments echo melodic line, Eb major
	<i>b</i>	Instruments echo melodic line, cadence in C-minor
		Interlude expanding <i>b</i> phrase, circle of fifths
		Ritornello based on original song’s ostinato, C-minor
Verse 2		Same as Verse 1
Chorus 2		Same as Chorus 1
Bridge		Discussed in more detail below
Chorus 3		Same as Chorus 1

**Figure 13** The outline with basic harmonic analysis of the “recitative” style verses with the ostinato in the bass

Counterpoint. Both Renaissance and Baroque music can have counterpoint, and there is very little counterpoint in “Dark Horse” and “Fancy”, so I found ways to add it into both arrangements. In “Dark Horse”, I chose to stagger entrances of phrases about halfway through the verses (see Figure 14) and choruses (see Figure 15) to provide a contrast to the homophonic entrances at the beginning of each section. For “Fancy”, I decided to make the bridge of the original into a fugue using existing themes found in both the bridge and chorus (see Figure 16). The melodic phrase structure of the bridge in the original song is *A-A-B-B*, but I assigned *A* as a subject and *B* as a countersubject played as a melody. This was a hybrid choice to retain the melody as the focus but rearrange the phrase structure to *A-B-A-B* (see Table 5) to give the impression of a traditional fugal exposition (but is not historically accurate).

B $\flat$ m

**Figure 14** Excerpt from the verses’ final phrase in “Dark Horse Madrigal”

**Figure 15** The second cadence in the chorus “Dark Horse Madrigal”

Figure 16 The fugal section as played by the strings, with the fugal elements and source material labeled

Table 6 An example of a four-voice fugue exposition with three countersubjects, and the structure of the fugal section of the “Fancy” arrangement. Bold text indicates the melody sung by the primary vocalist in the arrangement

Voice				
1	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Countersubject 1</b>	Countersubject 2	Countersubject 3
2		Answer	Countersubject 1	Countersubject 2
3			<b>Subject</b>	<b>Countersubject 1</b>
4				Answer

**Rhythm, Harmony, and Text.** For both arrangements, the rhythm and harmony of the original were not always compatible with the arranged style. Both “Fancy” (see Figure 11) and “Dark Horse” (see Figure 17) had heavily syncopated melodies, neither of which seemed to fit Renaissance or Baroque music. In both cases, some note durations were extended so that an accented note would fall on the downbeat (see Figure 18 for “Dark Horse Madrigal” and Figure 19 for “Fancy”) instead of the pickup to a downbeat.

Figure 17 Author’s lead sheet transcription of the first phrase of the chorus in “Dark Horse”

Figure 18 The first phrase in “Dark Horse Madrigal” with the rhythm adapted to end on the downbeat

Figure 19 The rhythm of the melody in the chorus adapted in the Baroque-style arrangement with harmonic analysis

In both “Dark Horse” and “Fancy”, I made several changes to harmonies from the original songs that (to my ears) fit better in the arranged style. In “Dark Horse Madrigal”, in one phrase in the verse, the melody is supported by a B-flat in the bass (see Figure 20), that in the context of the original is a harmonic B-flat minor scale. I chose to arrange the harmonies to briefly portray the melody in the parallel B-flat major/Ionian and Mixolydian (see Figure 21). Also, the parallel major is found in most of the cadences throughout the arrangement. These choices were largely inspired by both the King’s Singers “Cant Buy Me Love Arrangements” that would end with a cadence in the parallel major of the relative minor, but also in Morley’s *April Is In My Mistress’ Face* (see Figure 7) mentioned above. “Fancy” had less change to the harmonic structure, largely remaining in C harmonic minor throughout, but occasionally would move to E-flat major to fit the B-flat notes.



Bbm  
Make me your Aph - ro - di - te — Make me your one and on - ly — But

Figure 20 Author’s transcription of excerpt from *b* phrase of “Dark Horse”

S  
Make me your Aph - ro - di - te — Make me your one and on - ly  
palm of your hand now ba - by yes or a no No may - be

A  
Make me your Aph - ro - di - te — Make me your one and on - ly But  
palm of your hand now ba - by It's a yes or a no No may - be So

T  
Make me your Aph - ro - di - te — Make me your one and on - ly  
palm of your hand now ba - by yes or a no No may - be

B  
Make me your Aph - ro - di - te — Make me your one and on - ly  
palm of your hand now ba - by yes or a no No may - be

Figure 21 Excerpt from the *b* phrase of “Dark Horse Madrigal”

Text remained largely unchanged, with the exception of “Dark Horse Madrigal”, in which I chose to substitute “fa la” (see Figure 22) for the instrumental interlude in the original song, inspired by the Morley example from *Sing We and Chant It* (see Figure 8). In both “Fancy” and “Dark Horse”, I chose to keep the lyrics intact as a connection to the original, which is the largest aspect that I did not change or adapt to the Renaissance or Baroque era. This is still an ‘incompatibility’ because the language of modern day songs and the Baroque or Renaissance eras are greatly different.

S  
Fa la la la la Fa la la Fa la la Fa la la la la Fa la la Fa la la la

A  
Fa la la la la Fa la la Fa la la Fa la Fa Fa la Fa Fa la Fa la la la

T  
Fa la la la la Fa la la la la Fa la la la la Fa la la Fa la la la

B  
Fa la la la la Fa la la la la Fa la la Fa la la Fa la la Fa la la la la

Figure 22 The melody of the “fa la” codetta in “Dark Horse Madrigal”

**Musical Translation.** These choices to change melody, harmony, form, and texture remind me of issues I have translating sayings from one language to the other. For example, explaining the Japanese phrase *shikata ga nai* to Americans would not be correct as a direct translation (“There is no method”). I would either need to add an explanation, or use a completely different phrase that conveys the same meaning in English (“There is nothing you can do about it”). This reworking of the phrase to make sense in English is similar to reworking the themes into musical textures and harmonies to make more sense as a Renaissance or Baroque arrangement.

### Why Extreme Arrange?

While in the process of many of these arrangements, I would frequently be asked why I (or anyone, for that matter) would undertake this endeavour. Why arrange a song that is already popular into a style that is not popular, outdated, or obscure? There are many possible reasons for those interested, but for myself it is a musical connection, arrangement exercise, humour, education/musical translation, and/or personal enjoyment. Each of these aspects are also connected to my autoethnography as they all involve the relating of one musical style to another, similar to the experiences I have had relating my parents’ culture of the United States to the surrounding Japanese culture.

### Musical Connection

Occasionally, I notice a very specific musical characteristic in both an original song and a potential arranged style, such as the common melodic movement in “Dark Horse” and a madrigal. As another example, I arranged the song “Best Day of My Life” by American Authors (Accetta et al., 2013) for the traditional Chinese folk instruments (pipa, yangqin, yueqin, sanxian, sheng, guban, and erhu) found in Jiangnan Sizhu (Johnson, W. A., 2014b). The first thing I noticed about hearing “Best Day of My Life” was that the melody and accompaniment were almost exclusively in the anhemitonic pentatonic scale, which is the same scale largely used in Jiangnan Sizhu. Occasionally, after I notice a connection, I feel almost a sense of duty to make an arrangement if I cannot find one that matches the connection. When I first heard the song “Teenagers” (Bryar et al., 2007) by My Chemical Romance, the melody seemed uncannily suited to a rag by Scott Joplin. After failing to find a ragtime arrangement of this loud, angry-sounding rock song, I felt obligated to write such an arrangement of “Teenagers” (Johnson, 2012b).

### Arrangement Exercise

If an original song and the arranged style do not share musical characteristics, they may be relevant for other reasons, such as the concept of ‘fanciness’ when thinking of a genre for the Baroque arrangement of “Fancy.” Similarly, I arranged “Champagne Supernova” (Gallagher, 1996) by Oasis as a bossa nova entitled “Champagne Bossa Nova” (Johnson, W. A., 2013) solely because of the use of ‘nova’ in the original song and the arranged style. In addition to the barbershop medley, every March (starting

in 2013), I arrange a medley of popular songs as Irish jigs and a reel. The songs are selected based on their popularity and not for any other connection. When there is no initial connection, arranging becomes an exercise, fitting a musical 'square peg in a round hole', so to speak, becoming a challenge to make an original song somehow resemble the arranged style.

## **Humour**

When the disconnection between the original song and the arranged style is particularly extreme, the absurdity of the situation can often be humorous. In "Rockstar", the song is about the overindulgent, extravagant lifestyle of a top-end rock star, full of references to adoring women and recreational drugs. In the USA, barbershop music generally has the connection to either older people or a clean-cut lifestyle. "An Information Manual for Barbershop Quartets" (2011) states that "a good barbershop lyric ... is down-to-earth, often nostalgic, and uses the kind of language employed by popular songwriters during the barbershop era (turn of the 19th century into the 1920s), and of course, by any standard, must be in good taste." Thus, when a barbershop quartet sings about "sex, drugs, and rock'n'roll", the difference between 'a good barbershop lyric' and the topics of the song can create a humorous outcome. This similar outcome was desired when I kept lyrics such as "Let's get drunk on the minibar" in the oratorio arrangement of "Fancy". This approach is largely inspired by the humorous reaction I had when I first heard Richard Cheese's music, such as arranging Nirvana's "Rape Me" for a small jazz combo.

## **Education/Musical Translation**

Extreme arrangements can serve as educational tools, as illustrated by the Renaissance and Baroque examples. For students in music history or appreciation, arrangements of popular songs in historical styles can convey several connecting elements. It can draw a connecting line between the concepts of melody and Western harmony present both in Western history and popular music. Conversely, it can illustrate the changes in music over that time, particularly in rhythm, as the syncopation of what was originally African and African-American music present in popular music is conspicuously absent in European Renaissance and Baroque music. The educational aspect may also apply to cross-cultural and intercultural compositions, similar to my cross-cultural upbringing. My first exposure to the koto (Japanese zither) in Japan included traditional music and an arrangement of the Beatles' "Let It Be." As I knew "Let It Be" but had not heard a koto played in person, it served as a similar musical connection as those I now create. Conversely, the education could work in the opposite direction. For those who knew koto music, but not the Beatles, it could have also served as an education tool for popular music. Illustrating that elements of popular music contain elements of the arranged style may help gain an appreciation of the popular song.

## Personal Enjoyment

In almost every case, I arrange a song because I simply enjoy experimenting with music that encompasses my broad interests. Other occasions involve arranging a song that I do not enjoy in a style that I do, either to gain some sort of appreciation of the original style or associate the song I do not enjoy with a genre I do enjoy. Nearly all of my 'extreme arranging' stems from an intriguing idea into which I could put forth my musical knowledge, skill, and joy. Since I have had an account on YouTube since 2008, I have uploaded around 30 of these 'extreme arrangements', which combined have been viewed over 400, 000 times. My hope is that the listeners enjoy listening to them as much as I enjoy creating them.

## Conclusion

This entire article is autoethnographic; I can clearly speak for the cultural influences of my arrangements. Naturally, I cannot speak for all arrangers, because they have their unique backgrounds that influence their musicianship, which in turn influence their arrangement choices. I am not the first or only person to arrange in the manner that I do, but I may be the only person who arranges popular songs as barbershop quartets, Irish jigs, and Western classical music who grew up in Japan, so I can speak with authority on that aspect. I have discovered that while people may not have lived on two different continents, many experience multiple cultures. When living in the USA I worked in the fast food industry while being a music graduate student. The two worlds were physically 20 minutes apart, but conceptually much farther, and the music played in the workplace (rap and American country music) was vastly different than the George Crumb and Bach I would hear at the university. Hybrid genres like postmodernism, totalism, and polystylism in music are the hybrid combinations of genres of similar 'incompatibilities'. Ideally, my hope in 'extreme arranging' is to build a bridge between the differences and highlight the similarities between popular music and the arranged style.

As a person raised in one culture (Japan) by parents from another culture (the USA), and currently living in a different culture from either (Malaysia), I believe exposure to multiple cultures has benefited my perspective, allowing me to adapt and integrate positive aspects of all cultures. It also helps me in connecting cultures, such as explaining Japanese culture to an American in a way an American would understand, or explaining American culture to a Japanese person in a way a Japanese person would understand. In the same way, I believe that exposing people to a wide variety of music enhances their understanding of music in general. I would hope that 'extreme arranging' using two genres with which the arranger is familiar could be used as an autoethnographic model to 'translate' music into another style. I would encourage any arranger who has not done so to bring the multiple music of his or her world together.

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